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UNCLAS BRATISLAVA 000317

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SIMKO LOSES LEADERSHIP OF FREE FORUM

1. (SBU) ON MARCH 26, THE FOUNDING CONGRESS OF FREE FORUM (FF, A BREAK-AWAY PARTY FROM PM DZURINDA'S SDKU) TURNED INTO DRAMA WHEN IVAN SIMKO FAILED TO WIN THE CHAIRMANSHIP IN HIS NEW PARTY. INSTEAD, ZUZANA MARTINAKOVA WON BY A SINGLE VOTE (131 VS. SIMKO'S 130). THE VISIBLY SHAKEN SIMKO RELUCTANTLY ACCEPTED THE FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN POSITION. FOUR OTHER DEPUTY CHAIRS (JOZEF HURBAN, PETER BODY, BRANISLAV OPATERNY, AND EVA HLAVACOVA) WERE ALSO ELECTED. ACCORDING TO SOME ANALYSTS, THE VOTE REFLECTED A DIVISION IN OPINION IN THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED PARTY: MARTINAKOVA REPRESENTS MORE RADICAL OPPOSITION TO THE GOS AND SIMKO REPORTEDLY ADVOCATES A MORE MODERATE STAND.

ALWAYS IN SECOND PLACE

2. (SBU) SIMKO'S FAILURE TO BE ELECTED CHAIRMAN CAME AS A SURPRISE. SIMKO WAS NOT ABLE TO HIDE HIS DISAPPOINTMENT. HIS IMMEDIATE REACTION TO JOURNALISTS WAS, "IF I WERE A REAL MAN, I WOULD LEAVE." HOWEVER, HIS SUPPORTERS CONVINCED HIM TO ACCEPT THE FIRST DEPUTY CHAIR. SOME POLITICAL ANALYSTS POINTED OUT SIMKO'S TRACK RECORD: HE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A SUCCESSFUL PARTY ORGANIZER, BUT SOMEONE ELSE SERVES AS THE PUBLIC FACE. SIMKO HELPED TO ESTABLISH THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT PARTY (KDH), LATER SDK, AND THEN WITH DZURINDA THE SDKU, BUT HE REMAINED NUMBER TWO IN ALL OF THEM. IT HAPPENED AGAIN WITH FREE FORUM.

3. (SBU) HEAD OF THE IVO THINK TANK GRIGORIJ MESEZNIKOV TOLD POLFSN THAT THIS IS THE FIRST CASE IN SLOVAK PARTY HISTORY WHEN A FOUNDER FAILED TO WIN CHAIRMANSHIP. HE STATED THAT MARTINAKOVA IS A MORE ACCEPTABLE CANDIDATE FOR THE PUBLIC AND MAY GAIN MORE SUPPORT THAN THE OFTEN INDECISIVE AND INCOMPREHENSIBLE SIMKO.

4. (SBU) COMMENT: THE DCM WAS TOLD BY A SENIOR ANO POLITICIAN THAT FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM MARTINAKOVA'S HUSBAND MARIAN BEDNAR (FORMER MOD ADVISOR TO SIMKO AND ALLEGED MEMBER OF THE "SKUPINKA") HAS KEPT THE FF VIABLE. THIS INFORMATION HAS NOT APPEARED PUBLICLY, BUT IF TRUE COULD HAVE HELPED HER CANDIDACY. END COMMENT.

MORE RADICAL OPPOSITION

5. (SBU) THE ATTEMPT TO RECALL FINANCE MINISTER IVAN MIKLOS EARLIER THIS MONTH PUBLICLY REVEALED THE DIVIDE IN THE FF. WHILE SIMKO REFUSED TO SIDE WITH THE OPPOSITION, MARTINAKOVA ADVOCATED MIKLOS'S RECALL AS WELL-DESERVED. IN THE END, FF MP'S ABSTAINED FROM THE VOTE. PREVIOUSLY, THERE WERE HINTS OF DISAGREEMENT WHEN SIMKO CONDITIONED ENTERING THE GOVERNING COALITION ON DZURINDA'S RESIGNATION. SMK INTERLOCUTORS SPECULATED AT THE TIME THAT SIMKO WAS FOLLOWING ADVICE FROM OTHERS IN HIS NEW PARTY, BECAUSE HE HAD NOT BEEN SO RADICAL IN PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS.

6. (SBU) REFLECTING THE IDEOLOGICAL SPLIT, AND THE CLAIM THAT FF IS MORE DEMOCRATIC THAN THE SDKU, PARTY MEMBERS INSISTED THAT BOTH SIMKO AND MARTINAKOVA RUN FOR CHAIRMANSHIP. VIRTUALLY NO ONE EXPECTED THAT MARTINAKOVA WOULD WIN SINCE SHE WAS SIMKO'S PROTEGE. HE BROUGHT HER INTO POLITICS AS THE "FEMALE FACE" OF SDKU. SHE HAS MOVED FAR FROM THAT ROLE. SHORTLY AFTER HER ELECTION, MARTINAKOVA SAID THAT DZURINDA'S GOVERNMENT CAN NO LONGER RELY ON FF SUPPORT. SHOULD THERE BE ANOTHER RECALL VOTE ON MIKLOS, THE FF WOULD BACK IT, SHE ADDED.

BIO NOTES ON MARTINAKOVA

7. (SBU) MARTINAKOVA WAS BORN MAY 5, 1961 IN PUCHOV. SHE STUDIED FRENCH AND SLOVAK LANGUAGES AT COMMENIUS UNIVERSITY FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY IN BRATISLAVA. BEFORE ENTERING POLITICS, SHE WAS A JOURNALIST WITH SLOVAK RADIO, RADIO FREE EUROPE, AND THE BBC. SHE HAS BEEN CHAIRWOMAN OF THE "DEMOCRACY FOUNDATION" SINCE 2000, AND A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT SINCE 2002. HER CV STATES SHE IS FLUENT IN ENGLISH AND FRENCH, ALTHOUGH REPORTEDLY SHE FEELS UNCOMFORTABLE IN ENGLISH FROM LACK OF USE. SHE IS MARRIED TO MARIAN BEDNAR AND THEY HAVE THREE CHILDREN. COMMENT

8. (SBU) IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHAT EFFECT MARTINAKOVA'S FIRMER STANCE AGAINST DZURINDA WILL HAVE ON THE COALITION'S ABILITY TO GOVERN. FF WILL NOT ROCK THE BOAT BEFORE MAY 1 EU ACCESSION. IN THE PAST, MARTINAKOVA HAS MADE STRONG

STATEMENTS AND THEN BACKED DOWN. WHETHER SHE CAN MAKE FF
ENOUGH OF A PLAYER TO REMAIN ON THE POLITICAL SCENE BEYOND
THE NEXT ELECTIONS WILL BE HER BIGGEST CHALLENGE.

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